



Michigan Department of Agriculture

Food Digest

Food and Dairy Division Winter 2004

MDA Offers Risk Management Help

Managing risk is an essential part of long-term business survival. Many businesses in Michigan experienced the difficulties of risk first hand when the Blackout of 2003 resulted in over \$100 million in product losses in Southeast Michigan. Most businesses do not have an emergency or recovery plan even though they know it is important.

MDA wants to work with businesses to protect the food supply and ensure the economic viability of Michigan food and agricultural businesses. We are working at the national and state levels to identify what each of us can do to better safeguard these important assets. Together we can:

- Assess threats and vulnerabilities
- Implement cost-effective measures to reduce security risks or increase emergency preparedness,
- Develop response and recovery plans.

In 2003, the Michigan Food and Agricultural Protection Strategy, a farm-to-fork framework for a security partnership involving Michigan food industries, government agencies, and academic institutions, was developed. In 2004, MDA, along with others in this coalition, will shape specific steps for food security, which we will share through state food and agricultural associations and mailings such as this Food Digest.

(For additional information on this go to Critical Incident Protocol – A Public and Private Partnership. Copy can be downloaded from the web at www.cj.msu.edu/~outreach/CIP/CIP.pdf)

Food Safety Training Info Available

Beginning April 1, 2004, contact information for hundreds of food safety training programs will be available for food operators on the MDA website. The project, funded by the Industry Food Safety Education Fund, provides ready access to a wide variety of educational opportunities ranging from classroom settings to self-study courses. Food operators will find training, in one form or another, to be available statewide. Some of the materials are available in a variety of languages. Just log onto: www.michigan.gov/mda. On the "Quick Links" click "Food Safety".

Placards Available

Four self-adhesive educational placards featuring tips for proper Dishwashing, Hand Washing, Safe Temperatures for Hot and Cold Holding, and Cooling Procedures will be available in April. The colorful graphics and text will help remind employees of proper food handling practices. The placards will be available free of charge through your local health department. The placards have been funded by a grant from the Industry Food Safety Education Fund.

Risky Business

The Centers for Disease Control has identified 5 behaviors and practices as being the most prevalent contributing factors for foodborne illness. The five risk factors are:

- Poor personal hygiene
- Food from unsafe sources
- Inadequate cooking
- Improper holding temperatures
- Contaminated equipment

A reduction in the occurrence of the five high-risk behaviors will reduce the amount of suffering and number of deaths attributed to foodborne illness. MDA has set a goal to reduce the prevalence of the risk factors in food establishments by 25% by the year 2011. Your local health department sanitarian and MDA inspector will share detailed information on upcoming inspections.

MDA Sandwich Survey

The Michigan Department of Agriculture in 2003 surveyed Southeast Michigan businesses who make and distribute sandwiches to retail stores.

Inspectors found sandwiches that had not been properly refrigerated when being made or transported to retail locations. The Food Code requires retail stores to monitor the temperature of incoming food and reject it if not at the proper temperature (below 41° F in most cases). MDA inspectors will continue to monitor the temperature of sandwiches and other perishable items and take enforcement action when necessary.

The survey found that manufacturers used sell-by dates ranging from 6 to 27 days. The Food Code establishes 7 days as the last date certain foods (including lunch meat) can be consumed once they have been handled in a retail setting. MDA is very concerned about the use of meaningful sell-by dates and will be asking manufacturers to justify with scientific evidence their use of sell-by dates exceeding 7 days for retail sale of potentially hazardous foods like lunch meat sandwiches. This is a pressing concern due to recent outbreaks of *Listeria* associated with lunch meats.

2003 Blackout to Prompt New Policies

Prompted by the Blackout of 2003, state and local regulators and businesses have formed a stakeholder workgroup. They are developing uniform approaches to “imminent health hazards” affecting food establishments.

The workgroup is creating a communications strategy. Its members are also determining guidelines for businesses to follow in emergencies. One such recommendation allows businesses to remain open during certain emergencies if they have submitted emergency plans. Businesses that have not submitted emergency plans must follow prescribed operating steps or close temporarily. Final recommendations are expected by April 2004.

Date Marking Requirement Clarified

When Michigan adopted the 1999 Food Code, retail grocers raised concerns about meeting date marking requirements for deli service lunchmeat. MDA met with representatives of the retail grocery industry to discuss these concerns. Difficulties identified by this MDA/retail grocery industry workgroup included:

- Slow-moving meats are packaged in large sized loaves that many stores cannot sell within 7 days once the wholesale package is opened.
- Even popular varieties like bologna or hard salami are not available in small sizes, making it difficult for small retail stores to offer those products.
- Certain purchasing agreements are inflexible, mandating that retailers carry a full line and set quantities of company X's lunchmeat products - even the slow movers.
- Shelf-stable and non-potentially hazardous meat and deli items aren't readily identified by manufacturers.

The workgroup identified ways to assist retailers in meeting the date marking requirements. With the threat of *Listeria* continuing nationwide, the MDA/retail grocery industry workgroup will in March of 2004 release:

- Training information to assist grocers and deli managers in understanding how the date marking requirements apply in a deli setting.
- An open letter to meat manufacturers and distributors outlining the concerns of the work group from the retail perspective.

After an initial educational period, MDA will fully enforce the date marking requirement for deli lunch meats in June 2004. Retailers should already be date marking other deli products.

Note: there is a difference between the requirements for “sell-by” dates and “date marking”. If you have any questions or concerns please contact your regional office.

Food & Dairy Division Regional Offices

Region 1 – Upper Peninsula

Region 2 – Northern

Traverse City, MI (231) 922-5210

Region 3 – West Central

Region 5 - Southwest

Grand Rapids, MI (616) 356-0600

Region 4 – East Central

Saginaw, MI (989) 758-1778

Region 6 – South Central

Lansing, MI (517) 373-1060

Region 7 - Detroit

Southfield, MI (248) 356-1700

MDA Main Office

(517) 373-1060

Information on Line

To find or contact your local health department, go to

www.malph.org/page.cfm/108/

Additional information on food safety, laws, and regulations is available on MDA's web site:

www.michigan.gov/mda